Teaching ESP in a Hybrid Mode and in Academic Environment

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Abstract*: The pandemic faced mankind with a challenge, but revealed untapped opportunities for teaching and learning as well. The educational process in an electronic or hybrid mode became common practice and all stakeholders could feel its benefits. Now that we are back to normality, how can this experience be used to offer high-quality academic ESP courses in a hybrid mode? The paper aims at presenting a survey on students' and faculty's attitudes to hybrid ESP courses. The survey is part of a university project whose objective is the development of hybrid ESP courses at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE) in Bulgaria. The sample included 274 respondents from UNWE – 240 students and 34 lecturers. Additionally, a survey of 33 Italian lecturers was carried out, which allowed to make a comparative analysis of the faculty attitudes and perceptions. Insights into respondents' perceptions are presented and discussed with regard to the ESP course design. Recommendations are made for the development of reference criteria for the design of effective hybrid ESP courses.*

Keywords*: ESP, hybrid courses, ESP courses, hybrid ESP courses, academic ESP courses*

INTRODUCTION

Conventional or traditional mode of teaching face to face is no longer the only mode of instruction. In modern world and due to human development – scientific advance, emergence of new technologies and ways of communication, there are new modes of interaction and teaching – the electronic and the hybrid modes. The electronic one emerged with the advent of computers and enabled learners from remote places in Australia or similar regions to educate themselves. The advantages of the e-mode quickly influenced communication and the online mode gained popularity as an effective and efficient way of learning in terms of self-direction, private tuition, consulting, etc. Kumar and Kush explain this spread with the commercialisation of education and the focus on knowledge-based economy (Kumar and Kush, 2006), while for researchers like Lee and Duncan-Howell the reason for the rapid introduction of online learning is its cost-effectiveness and widened scope of education (Lee and Duncan-Howell 482). Russian educational experts define e-learning as:

> the provision of educational content (electronic) through the media based on the computer and its networks to the recipient in such a way

that allows the possibility of active interaction with this content and features and with its peers only simultaneous or not synchronized and the possibility of completing this learning in time and place and at the speed that suits conditions and abilities, as well as the possibility of managing this learning also through these media (Gorbunova, Kalimullin 1860-1872; Gorbunova, Mokeyeva 21-40; Khrulyova, Sakhieva 2011-225; Kvon et al. 891-902; Levina et al. 5019-5026 as cited by Abed 1)

According to Grimes and Whitmyer, e-learning is a pedagogical methodology and involves "the application of Internet technology to the delivery of learning experiences" (Grimes, Whitmyer 1). In addition, Abed uses Ishlaiwa's classification of the objectives of e-learning, which, actually, reveal its educational potential: increased possibility for communication using electronic options; easy access to the teacher; transfer of educational experience through forums, channels, etc.; modelling and presenting education in a standard form but spread by maximum use of audio, visual and related media; availability of curricula every day and multiple methods of student assessment (Ishlaiwa as cited by Abed 2).

The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020 accelerated the endemic introduction and use of online learning even in more conservative or financially disadvantaged institutions. What is more, it facilitated the spread of the newly emerged hybrid mode of communication and its introduction in education. In the beginning, classes were only online. In-between the pandemic waves and during the transitional period at the end of the pandemic, the hybrid mode of instruction was introduced in a lot of universities, including Bulgarian ones. Being a combination between the traditional in-person or face-to-face mode and the online one, it revealed a potential for minimising the weaknesses of each mode and at the same time, for maximising the effect of their strengths. This view is supported by Snart who sees the hybrid mode as "a fusion without a loss" (Snart 57). Meskill et al. (2010) emphasize the authentic and multimodal opportunities of hybrid courses, as well as the very effective interactions with learners that are not possible in the traditional mode. Hall (2010) notes that the hybrid mode is more flexible and beneficial for customised learning compared to the fixed time, location and pace of learning of the traditional mode. Furthermore, Carrasco and Johnson (2015) point to the fact that the hybrid mode provides institutions and faculty with the possibility to vary the ratio traditional – online mode and thus to benefit from their advantages. Watson highlights the following positive aspects of the hybrid mode: it offers student-centred teaching, enhanced interaction and mechanisms for integrated summative and formative assessment (Watson 5).

Examining the new hybrid mode, Alberts et al. propose considering eight guiding principles:

- "learning should be based on expected outcomes in terms of course content and a range of cognitive skills;
- learning programmes should require student active involvement;
- students should be encouraged to communicate and collaborate with the teacher and peers;
- teaching should create a learner-centred environment;
- it should accommodate different learning styles;
- it should provide timely and constructive feedback on learning;
- it should support learners to become autonomous;
- and should encourage and provide opportunities for student reflection on learning" (Alberts et al. 189-195 as cited by Stefanova, Todorova-Ruskova 67-74).

In addition, Singh et al. (2021) lay emphasis on the contribution of the hybrid mode to the development of students' management, comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Survey on students' and faculty's attitudes to hybrid ESP courses
Project rationale
The emergence of the hybrid mode of instruction and the paucity of research with regard to its use in ESP at universities prompted the need to study the way key educational stakeholders see hybrid courses in terms of parameters, motivation, teaching techniques. During the pandemic, the academic ESP courses that were taught based on the syllabi and materials for traditional face-to-face courses. Given the circumstances, running online and hybrid language and ESP courses this way was the only option then. However, running courses in the new modes which have their specific features and require a corresponding syllabus design in a non-extraordinary situation requires tailored syllabi and materials. Following our university practice and policy with regard to foreign language courses, a team of ESP practitioners focused on examining hybrid ESP courses in an academic environment. Taking into account the fact that the hybrid mode provides for regular attendance of the language courses that are based on ongoing assessment, the use of a host of platforms and resources, immediate feedback and contact with the teacher, improved control and adjustment of the pace of learning and self-direction, as well as of individual student engagement, developing academic hybrid ESP courses could add value to educational quality in the tertiary sector.

In order to develop academic hybrid ESP courses, an expert should study the research on the issue, the common practice and experience, as well

as the views of key stakeholders and participants in the educational process – students and faculty. Course parameters can be determined in an optimised way only if these groups' attitudes and perceptions are examined and taken into consideration. Therefore, the results from this research will enable the ESP team that carried it out to develop reference criteria for academic hybrid ESP courses and compile banks of teaching and assessing materials at the university they work for. Additionally, the criteria, research findings and banks of materials could be used by educational administrators, faculty and course developers worldwide and thus contribute to the improvement in overall language teaching and learning practice and theory.

The project focused on the development of hybrid ESP courses for students of economics and socio-political studies due to the profile of the University of National and World Economy and the programmes it offers. This is why its major tasks are to survey the literature on the issue discussed, to investigate students' and lecturers' perceptions and attitudes towards hybrid ESP courses, to set up banks and a database with specialised authentic materials to build up, consolidate and test learners' functional communicative competence in a flexible way enabling the achievement of meaningful learning results, to develop reference criteria for the design of hybrid ESP courses in the fields of economics and socio-political studies.

In line with project rationale, the research aimed to check several working hypotheses:

"**H1**: Students prefer hybrid learning as it is more motivating and suitable for their learning style.

H2: Students prefer hybrid learning as it best suits their lifestyle and communication.

H3: Students prefer hybrid learning as it is more effective in terms of acquiring ESP knowledge and skills.

H4: Students develop functional ESP communicative competence more effectively due to hybrid learning.

H5: Teachers consider the hybrid model of ESP instruction to be more effective in terms of developing and improving students' functional communicative competence.

H6: Students perceive the use of specialised banks with multimedia resources and materials for hybrid learning as part of modern and effective foreign language learning.

H7: Teachers consider the creation and exchange of banks of materials and resources for hybrid ESP instruction as a practice that leads to increased motivation and effectiveness of ESP courses." (Stefanova, Todorova- Ruskova 67-74)

The project is still running, which is why the paper presents analysis of the data that has been processed so far.

Survey of perceptions and attitudes

A survey of students' and faculty's perceptions and attitudes was seen as a prerequisite for the development of hybrid ESP courses that are modern, motivating for both stakeholders and adding value to the quality of education and students' future careers. The team focused on surveying UNWE students and faculty, but during the research process we took the opportunity of surveying Italian faculty with the same profile as UNWE lecturers. Hence it was possible to collect extensive data about students and faculty and conduct a thorough analysis of various aspects of the hybrid ESP courses in the tertiary sector.

For the purpose of data collection, a personal, online structured survey was used and the primary units were all UNWE students studying English. The observed units coincide with the primary ones. The sample includes the survey respondent students and is based on the information that UNWE students provided. Faculty were surveyed in order to triangulate data. Both respondent groups answered the same twenty-one questions, i.e. the questionnaire was identical in its main part. This part consists of nineteen questions, while the second part comprises only two questions intended to collect personal data about the respondent and correspondingly collects information about faculty experience and specialty or about student's specialty and year of study. The first part of the questionnaire includes questions based on a five-point Likert scale, multiple-choice questions and an open-ended one. The data are being analysed with the use of SPSS and the application of a complex approach that takes into account the interrelationships between the methods applied which include descriptive analysis, inferential analysis based on the hypotheses testing of relationships and dependencies, correlation analysis, cluster analysis, etc.

The team collected 240 responses from students, 34 responses from Bulgarian faculty and 33 from Italian faculty. The results from the initial data processing (Stefanova 102-103) are presented in the tables and figures below, so that one could compare the responses of the different respondent groups, draw conclusions and make recommendations with regard to the hybrid ESP courses design.

Questions	Students	Bulgarian Faculty	Italian Faculty
1.Hybrid academic ESP courses are part of modern education	31%- strongly agree; 53% - agree; 13 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree; 1%- strongly disagree	44% - strongly agree; 50% - agree; 6% - disagree	24%- strongly agree; 49% - agree; 18 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 9% - disagree;
2.Hybrid academic ESP	38%- strongly	56 % - strongly	24%- strongly

courses provide for greater flexibility	agree; 50% - agree; 8 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree; 2%- strongly disagree	agree; 38% - agree; 6% - neither agree, nor disagree	agree; 55% - agree; 12 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 3%- strongly disagree
3.Hybrid academic ESP courses enable students to work and study	37%- strongly agree; 42% - agree; 12 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 3%- strongly disagree	12%- strongly agree; 71% - agree; 12 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree; 3%- strongly disagree	15%- strongly agree; 43% - agree; 27 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 15% - disagree
4.Hybrid academic ESP courses increase learner motivation compared to traditional and online courses	21%- strongly agree; 40% - agree; 25 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 9% - disagree; 5%- strongly disagree	12% -- strongly agree; 41% - agree; 32% - neither agree, nor disagree; 9% - disagree; 6%- strongly disagree	12%- strongly agree; 12% - agree; 36% - neither agree, nor disagree; 30% - disagree; 9%- strongly disagree
5.Hybrid academic ESP courses enhance learner achievements compared to the traditional and online ones	8%- strongly agree; 46% - agree; 28% - neither agree, nor disagree; 8% - disagree; 10% - strongly disagree	9% - strongly agree; 32% - agree; 32% - neither agree, nor disagree; 21% - disagree; 6%- strongly disagree	9%- strongly agree; 9% - agree; 43 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 30% - disagree; 9%- strongly disagree
9.Students are interested in creating content for their ESP course (giving ideas, suggesting topics/ activities, etc.)	14%- strongly agree; 49% - agree; 29 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 2%- strongly disagree	18% - strongly agree; 44% - agree; 23%-neither agree, nor disagree; 9% - disagree; 6%- strongly disagree	6%- strongly agree; 24% - agree; 40 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 21% - disagree; 9%- strongly disagree
13. Hybrid academic ESP courses are more appropriate for modern learners' style of learning and communicating	27%- strongly agree; 50% - agree; 14% -neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 3%- strongly disagree	24% - strongly agree; 44% - agree; 21%-neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 6%- strongly disagree	15%- strongly agree; 30% - agree; 30 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 18% - disagree; 7% - strongly disagree
15.ESP learning is more effective and modern if students have access to banks of multimedia resources and materials for hybrid training	35%- strongly agree; 46% - agree; 14 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree; 2%- strongly disagree	32% - strongly agree; 53% - agree; 12%-neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree	30%- strongly agree; 48% - agree; 19 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree;
16.Do you think that the creation and exchange of banks of multimedia resources and materials	25%- strongly agree; 49% - agree; 19 % -neither agree, nor disagree; 5% -	18% - strongly agree; 62% - agree; 14%-neither agree, nor disagree; 6% -	21%- strongly agree; 45% - agree; 21 % - neither agree, nor

for hybrid training lead to enhanced learner motivation?	disagree; 2%-strongly disagree	disagree	disagree; 13% - disagree;
17.Do you think that the creation and exchange of banks of multimedia resources and materials for hybrid training lead to enhanced course effectiveness	25% - strongly agree; 50% - agree; 19% -neither agree, nor disagree; 5% - disagree; 1% - strongly disagree	24% - strongly agree; 56% - agree; 14%-neither agree, nor disagree; 3% - disagree; 3% - strongly disagree	21%- strongly agree; 58% - agree; 15 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree;
18.Hybrid ESP courses prepare students for their work in the future by creating an environment similar to their professional environment after their graduation	27% - strongly agree; 45% - agree; 21% -neither agree, nor disagree; 4% - dis-agree; 3% - strongly disagree	21% - strongly agree; 44% - agree; 26%- -neither agree, nor disagree; 6% - disagree; 3% - strongly disagree	15%- strongly agree; 33% - agree; 36 % - neither agree, nor disagree; 12% - disagree; 4%- strongly disagree

Table 1 Likert scale questions. *Source: author's research project*

Questions	Students	Bulgarian Faculty	Italian Faculty
6.In your opinion, which ESP courses are more beneficial and effective for students' future career	59%- hybrid; 25%-traditional; 16% - online	65%- hybrid; 32%-traditional; 3% - online	67%- hybrid; 33%-traditional
7.Hybrid academic ESP courses cannot ensure:	33% - objective assessment; 34%-detailed feedback about progress; 31% -discussions with the teacher about performance; other*	43% - objective assessment; 26%-detailed feedback about progress; 31% -discussions with the teacher about performance	18% - objective assessment; 46%-detailed feedback about progress; 36% -discussions with the teacher about performance
8.Which mode provides for the contact with the teacher that you need	45%- hybrid; 45%-traditional; 10% - online	38%- hybrid; 59%-traditional; 3% - online	33%- hybrid; 64%-traditional; 3% - online
10.Students are more involved in the learning process if the course is:	43%- hybrid; 44%-traditional; 13% - online	44%- hybrid; 53%-traditional; 3% - online	18%- hybrid; 82%-traditional
11.Which mode of assessment is the most effective one:	47%- hybrid; 40%-traditional; 13% - online	21%- hybrid; 76%-traditional; 3% - online	15%- hybrid; 85%-traditional
12.Which mode is more effective in terms of student skills and knowledge of specialised English	48%- hybrid; 39%-traditional; 13% - online	47%- hybrid; 50%-traditional; 3% - online	67%- hybrid; 33%-traditional

14.The academic ESP courses that equip me with the specialised knowledge and skills I need for my future career are:	54%- hybrid; 32%- traditional; 14% - online	65%-hybrid; 32%- traditional; 3%- online	39%- hybrid; 58%-traditional; 3% - online

Table 2 Multiple choice questions. *Source: author's research project*
* Other – indicated more options as more than one answer is possible: a & c; a, b & c; b & c; a & b

The results in Tables 1 and 2 show that overall students' and faculty's perceptions are similar – they think that hybrid courses are part of modern education, provide flexibility and the opportunity for students to work and study, welcome the possibility to avail of banks of instructional and assessment materials, and of a database of platforms, websites and other digital content. What is more, hybrid ESP courses are considered more effective, motivating and appropriate in terms of students' future career and environment.

It is noteworthy that, whereas students and Bulgarian faculty see the problems related to objective assessment as the most serious weakness of the hybrid courses, Italian faculty find the lack of detailed feedback a greater issue. A distinct difference is observed with regard to student involvement in terms of instruction mode. Once again and unlike students and Bulgarian faculty, Italian faculty see the traditional mode as the most involving one. However, the responses of the surveyed groups to the question about assessment effectiveness show that all lecturers are in favour of the traditional mode, while students are in favour of the hybrid one. Students assign equal importance to their contact with the teacher for both the hybrid and the traditional modes, while faculty perceive the traditional mode as the best option.

With regard to Q3 about the opportunity for students to work and study, Italian faculty seem less convinced of the potential of the hybrid ESP courses. One reason for this perception could be the fact that in Italy the educational landscape is different, which makes the respondent lecturers hesitant. In terms of learner motivation, Italian faculty disagree or hesitate about the advantages of the hybrid ESP courses unlike the majority of their Bulgarian colleagues and the students. In addition, while students agree that the hybrid mode enhances their achievements, faculty disagree and the Italian faculty feel more negative or hesitant in their responses.

When asked about their interest in content creation, respondent students are willing to participate, although a third is hesitant. Bulgarian faculty share this view, but the Italian lecturers are mostly hesitant or

disagree. Could it be due to the more passive attitude of the students in Italy - a further investigation could provide insights.

The analysis of the data obtained through the survey allows us to compare the views of the student and faculty respondents and to draw further conclusions with regard to the various aspects of hybrid ESP courses. The analysis of the differences in the perceptions and attitudes will contribute to the development of hybrid courses syllabi that take optimised advantage of the survey in order to determine course parameters in a way that satisfies both students and lecturers and thus results in optimised learning outcomes.

A comparison between the views of Bulgarian and Italian faculty shows differences worth consideration. Asked about the disadvantages of the hybrid mode (Q7), Bulgarian lecturers revealed greater concern about objective assessment, while their Italian colleagues were more concerned about detailed feedback. About a quarter of the Italian lecturers do not think that hybrid ESP courses provide for flexibility compared to only 6 % of the Bulgarian respondent faculty. As mentioned above, the vast majority of the Bulgarian lecturers – 84 % - perceive hybrid courses as the option for those students who work and study, whereas just 53 % of the Italian lecturers share this view and 27 % have no definite opinion. In terms of motivation, over half of the Bulgarian faculty find hybrid courses the best option compared to some 24 % of their Italian colleagues and with a third of Italian faculty being hesitant and another third not sharing this view.

Regarding the enhanced learner achievements and the mode with the greatest contribution to the academic ESP courses, only 18 % of the Italian lecturers think that the hybrid mode is better compared to 41 % of the Bulgarian lecturers. Another difference has already been observed in terms of content creation with the Bulgarian faculty being more in favour of the hybrid ESP courses and with a view coinciding with the view of the respondent students, which is worth noting because in its practice the research team has observed stronger student engagement when content is created together with or encouraged by the lecturer and a syllabus taking this detail into account is considered more effective. Another difference is the fact that Italian faculty are less inclined to believe that the hybrid mode is more appropriate for modern learners' style of learning and communicating. Could it be due to a more conservative view, a different reality or a preference for face-to-face communication and learning? The same situation is observed with the responses to Q16 and Q18 which are aimed at collecting information about the relationship between the access to multimedia resource banks and learner motivation, as well as on the benefits of the similarity between the learning and work environments associated with multiple modes of communication.

As for the faculty's perceptions of the downsides of the hybrid ESP courses, it has already been discussed above and one more difference has been highlighted. It might be due to a different level of importance assigned to feedback or to the view that feedback provided online or in the hybrid mode is less effective than the one given in class. In addition, Bulgarian faculty are convinced that the most objective way of assessing learner results is the traditional mode, while the Italian faculty give a priority to the hybrid one. Perhaps, the Italian respondents did not face the problems their Bulgarian colleagues faced with cheating. In terms of the acquisition of functional communicative competence, Italian lecturers give priority to the hybrid courses, but feel that the traditional ones are more useful to students' future careers. This is a kind of contradiction given the fact that more and more organisations are introducing the hybrid mode of work. What is more, it differs from the view of the Bulgarian respondent lecturers. However, a similarity is shown in both faculty groups with regard to learner involvement, but Italian respondents believe more strongly in the advantages of the traditional ESP courses.
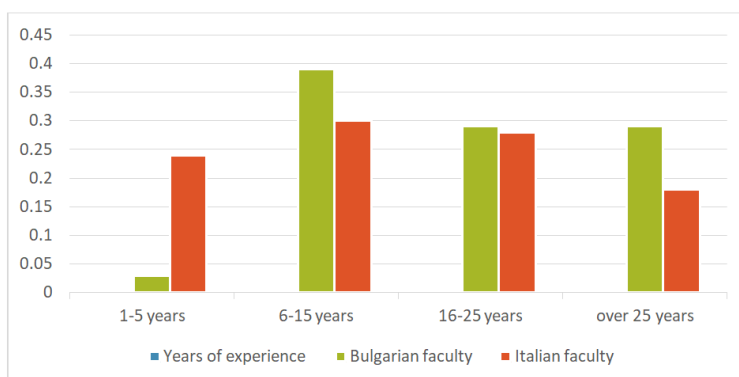
Figure 1. Faculty experience. *Source: author's research project*
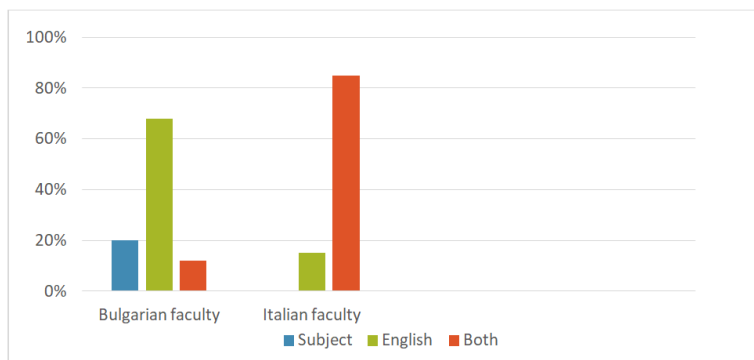
Figure 2 Faculty specialty. *Source: author's research project*

A look at the graphs above shows the split of the faculty in terms of experience and discipline taught. This could be one explanation for the difference in the faculty's opinions or for the differences between the views of the Italian faculty on the one hand, and the Bulgarian faculty and the students, on the other. Most of the Bulgarian lecturers teach ESP, while most of the Italian lecturers have indicated both subject and English, but it is not clear whether they chose this answer because they teach in English or because they have educational degrees and qualifications in both English and the subject. Since in Bulgaria it is not possible to teach a discipline without being qualified for it (a master's degree for academic institutions), Bulgarian respondents have responded accordingly. The point is that a language teacher has the specialised preparation in terms of methodology and linguistics and hence has a better judgement in terms of student language training and acquisition. On the other hand, Italian faculty could be the ones with a more objective judgement due to reasons the research team is unaware now. A further survey could help clarify this issue and provide meaningful details.

The open-ended question was intended to invite respondents to share their attitudes towards and opinions of the hybrid ESP courses. The data gathered were more than interesting and insightful, which is why below are presented some the most meaningful ones in terms of the issue examined and in the original form they were provided:

Comments
Italian faculty
"Hybrid courses are the worst of the two other worlds - traditional and online. However, saying 'traditional' only regards the teaching environment: there is nothing intrinsically good or better in it. The same for 'online' courses, though the organization should definitely be different, and perhaps also the aims. Effectiveness, studet's benefits, contacts, preparation etc are independent from those two environments, though mixing them is a bad choice in my personal experience. There could be exceptions, but it is more likely to obtain something that is worse than its two components."
"The definition of hybrid is quite flexible."
"They are effective."
"New teaching tools can be useful, but precisely because of their convenience, they risk reducing the quality of necessary interpersonal relationships."
"Stil evaluating its potentials, hybrid has clearly its positive outcomes, but I still believe that traditional teaching in class is way more effective. I am though convinced of the opportunity to provide additional hybrid facilities."

"benefits can be achieved if online and traditional teaching integrate. It depend by the subject; in the case of foreign languages online can provide great resources."

"The hybrid academic ESP courses efficaciously integrates diverse pedagogical approaches, offering a versatile and adaptable learning environment that caters to the varied preferences and needs of learners in specific professional or academic contexts."

Bulgarian faculty
"The future of education"

"They must be introduced in HEIs in order to provide higher quality education and strengthen performance"

"To be effective enough, the academic ESP courses must be combined with a digital system for tracking the achievements and results of the students"

"To have hybrid courses, but within a hybrid course there is more traditional teaching, not online"

"They could be used as a last resort"

"The ratio between traditional and online classes is important"

"Traditional courses provide direct contact between teacher and student, allow the teacher to monitor students' body language and understanding, and adapt the learning material to their reactions. This is almost impossible in hybrid and online learning. I believe that the traditional form of academic courses gives the best results, but of course, if it is supplemented with multimedia, case studies, discussions, business games, searching for information on the Internet during the classes, etc."

"The hybrid academic courses are very suitable for students as most of them are working. Moreover, the hybrid environment is the "new normal" so the academia should not be excluded from this trend."

"I believe hybrid language courses can be as effective and efficient as traditional (in-class) courses, if teachers use appropriate instructional design techniques, in particular appropriate learning activities and assessment methods."

Students
"In my opinion the traditional ESP courses are more effective"

"I find ESP courses a little bit more convinient than only the traditional or online ones but they also have their cons"

"Hybrid education should be enforcement only in force major cases"

"For me personally it is very useful and meaningful, definitely not a waste of time"

"They could become attractive if they are strongly supported by additional resources"

"It's pointless. Traditional courses are the most effective", "It's fine as long we have at least 50% in person classes"

"I think it's motivating and really nice for those who want to be prepared for future job with also hybrid tape of working process!"

"When it comes to assessment on personal knowledge, it is better face-to-face examination. In terms of new material teaching, it is up to the teacher to present the information not only in the traditional way, but also using interactive online learning materials (Google, games, research, etc.)"

"Gives students flexibility, because student years are not only for going to university. It is about finding yourself as a growing person and experiencing opportunities. The best time to try is whatever we want is now. And schedule flexibility would allow us the students to do so."

"The effect of hybrid ESP courses won't be noticeable unless you have hybrid academic courses for all subjects."

"Online and hybrid courses are definitely the future. Speaking from experience, during the COVID lockdown years, when our university was 100% online was the time I was most productive in my studies, projects and academic refinement."

"Hybrid studying should be available for all lectures. We live in 2023 and people must decide if they want to attend the lecture in person or via technology."

"Its very personal and different for every person. I think its good to have this kind of education but make exceptions, if someone is more comfortable with the traditional way, most of his studies will be traditional and the same thing if someone is comfortable with the online version."

"ESP courses are flexible and allow for more proper time management of the students. Video recording of lectures/sessions gives an opportunity to go back and review lecture material."

"They are one of the most efficient ways for learning professional English and they provide us with the opportunity for gathering banks of multimedia and preparing for the lifepath we strive for."

These comments clearly illustrate the variety and nuances of perceptions and attitudes. It can be concluded that both students and faculty have doubts related to some components of the hybrid ESP courses, such as effectiveness, lack of enough practice, traditional-online classes ratio, assessment. On the other hand, though, they realize the potential new technologies offer and are willing to use modern age achievements emphasizing strengths like flexibility, access to a myriad of digital resources, the possibility to introduce a digital tracking system for tracking of students' performance.

Conclusion

Different modes of teaching, the remote and hybrid ones, emerged due to the impressive advance in science and technology. The hybrid mode combines the traditional face-to-face mode and the remote one. It gained popularity during the pandemic and since then strenuous research has been conducted to examine its benefits and downsides. The study presented in this paper aims to establish what the perceptions and attitudes of two key stakeholders – students and lecturers - in education are. The survey that the academic team from Bulgaria carried out provided valuable data whose analysis will help to design hybrid ESP courses for students majoring in economics and socio-political studies that lead to enhanced motivation and educational process. Data analysis is still in process along with literature survey and the preparation of materials banks, so it is the team's expectation that in the final stage of this university project, the reference criteria for the development of hybrid ESP courses will contribute to ESP theory and practice by ensuring maximised course effectiveness and examining an issue that has not been studied much. What is more, the research findings can be used in the development of hybrid ESP courses in all areas of scientific, economic and social activity worldwide with some adjustments in cases of different national stereotypes or educational policy. Further research based on this study could include surveys of students and/or faculty aimed at finding out more details about particular attitudes and perceptions, as well as a further comparative analysis involving more countries or including other stakeholders, such as educational administrators and employers.

Acknowledgement

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